THE DOCTRINE OF THE ISMAILIS

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By

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Gefinor Center, Clemenceau St. - - P.O.Box 5460
Beirut, Lebanon

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Mr. Moustapha Ghaleb, a Syrian Ismaili scholar, who suggested that I write this book and furnished me with valuable sources.

My gratitude also goes to Professor Jean Praninskas of the American University of Beirut for reading the manuscript and for helping me to improve its language.

As in most of my work, I was provided with understanding and helpful suggestions from my wife, Julie Makarem.

S.N. Makarem

American University of Beirut
14 December, 1969.

CONVENTIONS

Those non-English names and works which have accepted English forms are used accordingly throughout the text.

The system of transliteration of other non-English names and words is the same as that used in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with slight variations.

Arabic names of modern authors who wrote in a western language are spelt as they themselves spell them.

The dates and places of publication of sources and references mentioned in the footnotes are given in full in the bibliography.

Qur'ānic passages that occur in the present work are based on M.M. Pickthall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, and on A.J. Arberry's the *Koran Interpreted*, but modified in some cases by the author. References to the Qur'ān cite chapter and verse of the official Egyptian text.

Passages from Arabic are rendered into English by the author of this work.

Words between square brackets are explanatory additions by the translator of the passage in which such words occur.

FORWARD

The doctrine discussed in this book is that of the Ismailis who follow the Aga Khan. They are known as the Shia Imami Ismailis. Their present Imam, H.R.H. Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, is their forty-ninth Imam. He descends from Nizār, the eldest son of the Fāṭimid Caliph-Imam al-Mustanṣir Billāh, whose lineage goes back to al-Ḥusayn, son of ʿAlī the first cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad. Hence the Shia Imami Ismailis belong to the Ismaili Nizārī persuasion.

Ismailism in general played an influencial role in both the Islamic thought and history. It brought about the Fāṭimid State (292 A.H./909 A.D. — 567 A.H. / 1171 A.D.) which extended its hegemony for a considerable time of its life to include North Africa, Sicily, Egypt, Syria, the Hejaz and the Yemen. Accordingly, Ismailism contributed significantly to the political, philosophical, social and intellectual aspects of Islamic civilization. This Ismaili movement gave rise as well to the Nizārī State of the Assassins in Persia (483 A.H./1090 A.D. — 654 A.H./1256 A.D.) and to a sisterly state in Syria (535 A.H. / 1140-1 A.D. — 658 A.H. / 1260 A.D.).

Nizārī Ismailism passed through various stages until it witnessed a social, cultural and economic revival and a resurgence of interest in doctrine under the guidance of the late Imam Aga Khan III and his grandson the present Imam Prince Karim Aga Khan IV.

As the reader will note in this book, the Shia Imami Ismailis of the present time have gone back in many of their beliefs to the Ismaili doctrine as it was viewed by the Fāṭimids. Since the various stages through which Ismailism has passed do not con-

cern the subject matter presented herewith, I shall not discuss this subject in this book; I shall rather confine myself to the account of Shia Imami Ismaili doctrine of today.

One can by no means have a thorough understanding of present day Islam unless he studies the different contemporary Islamic movements of which the Shia Imami Ismailis form an important and significant sect, whether in respect to the role they are now playing in Islam as a religion, or to the role that they are playing in relation to the political, economic, cultural and social life of the countries in which they reside.

INTRODUCTION

The Ismailis believe that Islam is based on seven pillars. These are fully described in al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān's *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*[1]. The first of these pillars is Belief (*īmān*), the second is Purification (*ṭahāra*), the third is Prayer (*ṣalāt*), the fourth is Alms giving (*zakāt*), the fifth is Fasting (*ṣawm*), the sixth is Pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) and the seventh is Struggle in God's way (*jihād*).

The first pillar, Belief, is, as al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān (d. 363 A.H. / 974 A.D.) says, «to witness that there is no God but God, and Muḥammad is His servant and Messenger; to believe in Heaven, Hell, Resurrection, and Doomsday, in God's Prophets and Messengers and in the Imams, to know and acknowledge the Imam of the time (*imām az-zamān*)[2] and to submit to his will; to comply with God's commands; and to obey the Imam and accept his commands.»[3]

In the same book al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān relates that Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, replying to a question about *islām* and *īmān* (belief) said, «*islām* is acknowledgment (*iqrār*), whereas *īmān* is both acknowledgment and knowledge (*maʿrifa*). He to whom

(1) Al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān ibn Muḥammad, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, vol. 1. Edited by Asaf A.A. Fyzee.

(2) The Ismailis rely on the following prophetic Tradition, «He who dies without knowing the Imam of his time when still alive dies in ignorance.» (See *ibid.*, vol. 1. pp. 31, 34). It is interesting to notice that a similar Tradition is related by the Sunnī doctor Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, namely «He who dies without an Imam dies in ignorance.» (Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol, 4, p. 96. See also A.J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la Tradition musulmane*, vol. 1. p. 90. Also the Twelver Shīʿite doctor Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī quotes a similar version, namely, «He who dies without an Imam his death is that of ignorance.» (al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 376-377; vol. 8, p. 146).

(3) Al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, vol. 1, p. 5.

God makes known his own self, his Prophet and his Imam, and who then acknowledges such, is a *mu'min*.»[1]

The Ismailis base this distinction between *islām* and *īmān* on the following Qur'ānic verse: « The Bedouins say: We believe. Say: You do not believe; rather say: We surrender; for belief has not yet entered your hearts.»[2]

The author of *al-Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya* says that knowing the Imam is the perfection of Belief[3].

Placing such importance on allegiance to the Imam the Fāṭimid *dā'ī*, al-Mu'ayyad fīd-Dīn (d. 470 A.H. / 1077 A.D.) makes all other pillars subordinate to Allegiance (*walāya*). He says, «God enjoined Purification, Prayer, Alms Giving, Fasting, Pilgrimage and Struggle in God's way. Allegiance to the Legatee (*al-waṣī*) and to the Imams was made by Him in order to hold and bind all things and to prevent everything from disorder. It is the final enjoinment of Religion. If Allegiance to the Legatee stops, Purification, Prayer, Alms Giving, Fasting, Pilgrimage and Struggle in God's way will be nullified and Religion will go back to ignorance (*al-jāhiliyya*). Allegiance is the support of Religion.» [4]

Belief (*īmān*), then, is only achieved, according to the Ismailis, through Allegiance (*walāya*) [5] to the Imam of the time. This is because the Imam in Ismailism is the one who guides the believers to knowledge (*ma'rifa*) and it is only through knowledge that the *Muslim* (who is such by mere acknowledgment (*iqrār*) of the divine Message) becomes a true believer (*mu'min*).

The Imams are thus the guides to true knowledge. The Ismaili *dā'ī* Abūl-Fawāris Aḥmad ibn Ya'qūb (flourished in the second half of the 4th century A.H. / 10th-11th century A.D.) speaks of the Imams saying: «God has made them the gates to

(1) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 16.

(2) Qur'ān, 49:14.

(3) M.K. Husayn (ed.), *al-Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, p. 25.

(4) *Al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, vol. 1, p. 156, quoted in M.K. Husayn's Introduction to *Dīwān al-Mu'ayyad fīd-Dīn Dā'ī ad-Du'āt*, p. 70.

(5) Cf. Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, «Some Notes on the Qur'ānic Use of the Terms *Islām* and *Imān*,» *The Muslim World*, vol. 57, no. 2(1967), pp. 94-102.

His mercy, the keepers of His wisdom, and the guides to the knowledge of His unity and to obedience to Him.»[1]

It is therefore not enough to acknowledge the divine Message. One must strive to surpass mere acknowledgment (*iqrār*) to true knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of the divine message.

Allegiance to the Imam then is associated with the first pillar, namely, Belief. This explains the great importance the Ismailis attach to their Imams.

Hence Allegiance to the Imam is for the Ismailis the most important of the seven pillars. Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir, relates al-Qāḍī an-Nu'mān, describes Allegiance as being «the best among [the seven pillars]. Through it and through those to whom Allegiance should be paid, the knowledge [of the other pillars] is reached.»[2]

(1) Abūl-Fawāris Aḥmad ibn Ya'qūb, *ar-Risāla fīl-Imāma*, in *Majmū' at-Tarbiya*, vol. 2, compiled by Muḥammad ibn Ṭāhir, fol. 82. A manuscript at the library of the American University of Beirut. An edition, English translation and commentary of ibn Ya'qūb's *Risāla* by Sami N. Makarem, is to be published soon.

(2) Al-Qāḍī an-Nu'mān, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 3.

CHAPTER ONE

COSMOGONY AND ESCHATOLOGY

In order to clarify the meaning of Belief (*īmān*) upon which Ismailism is based, it is necessary to understand first the Ismaili concept of cosmogony.

In his epistle entitled *Tuhfat al-Mustajībīn*, the Ismaili *dāʿī* Abū Yaʿqūb Isḥāq as-Sijistānī (d. 331 A.H. / 942 A.D.) says that divine Will (*al-amr*) was the only thing to issue out of God. This divine Will is the source of existence. It is the first cause of creation, or the cause of causes (*ʿillat al-ʿilal*)[1]. The following Qur'ānic verse is quoted: «His *Amr*, when He desires a thing, is to say to it 'Be', and it is.»[2]

God, thus, by His own nature has a Will which necessarily exists by virtue of God's existence. The very fact that God exists implies that He has a Will. Just like the human intellect is called such because it exercises its intelligence, God is such because He has aWill. And as intelligence is originated by the human intellect (no one can conceive of an intellect without intelligence), in the same way the Will of God exists by the necessity of the existence of God. The Will of God is, therefore, the source and cause of every being that exists. In other words, it is the primordial cause of this existence. As for God, He is the «Causer» (*ʿāll* or *muʿill*) of this primordial cause Who originated it.

Here the Ismaili doctrine differentiates between a cause (*ʿilla*) and a «causer» (*ʿāll* or *muʿill*). God is the «Causer» of the

(1) A. Tamer (ed.), *Khams Rasāʾil Ismāʿiliyya*, pp. 147-150.
(2) Qur'ān, 36:82.

primordial cause because He moves it to act and interact without being Himself affected by this primordial cause. Hence we cannot say that God is a cause as such. When causing a thing to come into existence, a cause is affected by this act, it is actualized by the thing's coming into existence. Whereas God is not actualized by something else. He is pure actuality. He is the Unmoved Mover, as Aristotle says, that is, He who moves everything towards Him without He Himself ever being moved.

This Will of God, which was transubstantiated into the divine Word, «Be!» (*kun*), according to the Qur'ānic verse: «His *amr*, when He desires a thing, is to say to it 'Be', and it is,» [1] is the First Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-awwal*). It is interesting to know that the Arabic verb *ʿaqala*, from which the word *ʿaql* is derived, means to enclose. The First Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-awwal*) is so called because it is inclusive of all existing beings. This is why it is also called the First Existent (*al-mawjūd al-awwal*). It is, as has been mentioned above, the primordial cause of existence. It necessarily exists by virtue of the existence of God. The Fāṭimid *dāʿī* Aḥmad Ḥamīd ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. shortly after 363 A.H. / 947 A.D.) says:

> If the existence of the first is not established, the second would not exist. And if the existence of the second is not established, the third would not exist. Therefore, the second and third only exist by reason of the existence of what is first to them and a cause to their existence. The existence of the third, the fourth and other existing beings is, therefore, a proof for the existence of a first to them, and a cause without which nothing would exist. By the existence of these, the existence of a first principle is proven, from which existence other existing beings resulted. This first principle we call the First Intellect or the First Existent whose existence is not by itself, but rather by its creation by the Transcendent, may He be praised.[2]

(1) Qur'ān, 36:82
(2) Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿAql*, p. 158.

From the First Originated Being (*al-mubdaʿ al-awwal*) emanated two other beings: the Second Intellect, called the Inclusive Soul (*an-nafs al-kulliyya*), and the First Matter (*al-hayūlā al-ūlā*).

The Inclusive Soul issued out of the First Intellect by emanation. Hence it is called the First Emanating Being (*al-munbaʿith al-awwal*).[1]

Since the First Originated Being, i.e. the First Intellect, explains al-Kirmānī,[2] is knowing in himself and thinking in himself, he is both contemplating and being contemplated. He is contemplating, because he contemplates himself; he is being contemplated, in the sense that his own self is being contemplated by him. In other words, he is both active and passive.

In contemplating himself, the First Originated Being knew that he was God's Activity i.e. he was the First Being to issue out of God, i.e. the First Intellect.

By thus knowing himself, a light says al-Kirmānī,[3] illuminated and radiated from him. This radiation of light is what is meant by emanation (*inbiʿāth*). This light that radiated from him is what is called the First Emanating Being (*al-munbaʿith al-awwal*). It is the first to emanate from the First Intellect. Hence it is second to him. That is why it is also called the Second Intellect.

This Second Intellect emanated, as was shown above, from the First Intellect as a result of the latter's act of contemplating himself. That is, as a result of the First Intellect's activity.

On the other hand, a being other than the Second Intellect also emanated from the First Intellect, but as a result of the First Intellect's being contemplated by himself. That is, as a result of the First Intellect's passivity. Hence it is called the First Hyle (*al-hayūlā al-ūlā*), or the First Matter. Being passive by nature, this First Matter is passive to the activity of the Second Intellect, also called the Inclusive Soul. From this First Matter the physical world came into being.

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 212.
(2) *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208, 221.
(3) *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

From the Inclusive Soul, who is the Second Intellect and the first to emanate from the First Intellect, emanated a Third Intellect.

Since the First Intellect is the First existent, he is inclusive of all existing beings. He thus gives the existing beings their forms which are, as al-Kirmānī says, «the real essence of existing beings... That is why God called him in His Book 'the giver of forms' (*al-muṣawwir*).»[1]

The Second Intellect, on the other hand, is the one who is «distinguished particularly by the act of producing (*bar'*), that is, giving these forms what makes them most expedient... that is why God (exalted He be) called him the producer (*al-bāri'*).»[2]

As for the Third Intellect, he is the one who is «distinguished particularly by the act of fashioning [things in the image of these eternal forms] (*al-khalq* which means composition). That is why God (exalted He be) called him in His Book the fashioner (*al-khāliq*). God,» continues al-Kirmānī, «combined these three functions in one Qur'ānic verse. He brought them into relation with the First by saying, 'He is God, the Fashioner, the Producer, the Giver of forms. To Him belong the Names Most beautiful'.[3] That is, to Him belong the functions that come after[4] [the previous three].»[5]

Now, from the Third Intellect emanated a Fourth one. From the Fourth emanated a Fifth Intellect. A Sixth one emanated from the Fifth, and from the Sixth Intellect emanated a Seventh. An Eighth emanated from the Seventh, a Ninth emanated from the Eighth, and from the Ninth emanated a Tenth Intellect.[1]

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 254.

(2) *Ibid.*, The word *bar'* from which the word *bāri'* is derived signifies, among other things, the act of producing «out of pre-existing matter.» (See E.W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, article ﺑﺮﺃ).

(3) Qur'ān, 59:24.

(4) See below, pp. 30-31.

(5) Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'Aql*, p. 254. The word *khalq* of which the word *khāliq* is derived means «The act of *measuring* or *determining the measure, proportion,* or *the like,* of a thing, and the *making* a thing *by measure,* or *according to the measure of another thing*: or *proportioning* a thing *to another thing*.» (See E.W. Lane, *op. cit.*, article خلق).

These ten Intellects constitute what the Ismailis call the Intelligible World (*'ālam al-'uqūl*).

Al-Kirmānī and other Ismaili doctors held that the Intelligible World consists of ten Intellects so that these ten Intellects may coincide with the ancient theory which stated that the universe was composed of ten spheres, namely the sphere of spheres, the sphere of the fixed stars, those of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the sun, Venus, Mercury, the moon, and the earth (also called the sub-lunary sphere). Each of the ten Intellects is in charge of one of these ten spheres.[2] As each superior Intellect is inclusive (*kullī*) of the inferior one, each superior sphere is inclusive of the lower ones.

Hence, by governing the sphere of spheres which is inclusive of all the lower spheres, the First Intellect is inclusive of the whole existence. He is, therefore, the all-Inclusive Intellect. In him the whole existence becomes one. He is, as as-Sijistānī says, «the reality of all things.»[3]

Being the First Existent, the First Intellect necessarily exists

(1) Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'Aql*, pp. 254-256.

Some Ismaili sources give another version of the ten Intellects. It can be summarized as follows: From the Inclusive Soul emanated a Third Intellect. By coming into existence, this Third Intellect started to think of himself. He questioned the First and Second Intellects' precedence and superiority over him (Hence we come in contact with the way some Ismailis understand the Biblical concept of the fall of Adam). He refused to recognize their precedence. As a result to his nonrecognition of their ontological anteriority he came to a standstill. He fell in a state of stupor which separated him from the rest of the Intelligible World. However, the Third Intellect was finally able to free himself from his stupor. When he did he discovered that seven other Intellects had already emanated. He realized that he was delayed; instead of being the Third Intellect he now found himself to be the Tenth. (See Henri Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, pp. 124 ff.). Professor Corbin calls it «le drame dans le ciel.» See also Bernard Lewis, «An Ismā'īlī Interpretation of the Fall of Adam,» *BSOS*, (1938), vol. 9, p. 702. Also see Sami Makarem, *ash-Shāfiya, an Ismā'īlī Poem Attributed to Shihāb ad-Dīn Abū Firās*, pp. 180-181.

This version, however, as Professor Corbin notices, has not yet been seen except in Yemenite Ismaili works, that is to say in Musta'liyan, not Nizārī books. (See Henri Corbin, *Trilogie ismaélienne*, p. 74.

(2) See al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'Aql*, pp. 255-257.

(3) As-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābī'*, p. 25.

by virtue of the existence of God, the Originator, the «Causer» of the Cause of Causes, Who is the One, the only Existent *par excellence*. Nothing exists beyond God. As for the First Intellect who is also called the First Existent, he is merely God's Will (*irāda*) and God's Activity (*amr*).

Now, the earth is divided into three parts: the highest part consists of the animals, the second consists of the plants, and the third of the minerals.

Among the animals the most superior is man. He possesses all the characteristics of the animals, plants and minerals. In addition he is endowed with reason.

Man is fashioned according to the First Originated Being who is the First Intellect. The Ismaili poem, *ash-Shāfiya*, attributed to the *dāʿī* Shihāb ad-Dīn Abū Firās (flourished probably in the 8th century A.H. / 14th century A.D.), says in one of its verses:

> Be He glorified as an Originating Creator
> Who shapes the Image in the created.[1]

Al-Kirmānī explains this belief by saying:

> Every efficient cause gives to that which it has caused (and the latter, in fact, actualizes its cause in form) that by which it exists. Since the realm of Origination (*dār al-ibdāʿ*), which is the source of existence, is the cause of all existing beings, and since that which [the act of Origination] has brought into existence, which is the culmination of this existence, is man; it follows that the form of man, according to which he exists, must be the form by which the act of Origination is characterized.[2]

It follows from what has been mentioned above that the form of man, the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is the First Intellect.

(1) Sami Makarem, *ash-Shāfiya*, pp. 32-33.
(2) Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿAql*, p. 264.

Al-Kirmānī then concludes, «The World of Origination, then, with all the Intellects it contains, is similar to man.»[1]

We have seen above that the World of Origination consists of the ten Intellects, while the Physical World consists of the ten spheres. The Tenth of these spheres is the sub-lunary sphere, on which planet, the earth, man is the highest creature. This is due to the faculty of reason by which he is superior over other animals.

Through reason man can tread the way which leads him to knowledge. With knowledge he can realize salvation and, consequently, happiness.

In this respect the Ismaili *dāʿī*, Abū Yaʿqūb Isḥāq as-Sijistānī, says in his book entitled *al-Yanābīʿ*:

> Since the utmost of reward is happiness, and since the happiness of the senses is discontinuous and short lived, [the happiness] attained by those rewarded [in the afterlife] must then be eternal, not ephemeral, and must be everlasting, not interrupted. There is no happiness that is simple and permanent save the happiness that comes from knowledge. Therefore, those who will be rewarded in the afterlife shall be rewarded with the happiness of knowledge. God (to whom belongs glory and power) said, «Its produce is eternal, and likewise its shade. That is the requital of the Godfearing.» [2, 3]

Explaining the meaning of Paradise, as-Sijistānī continues to say:

> Paradise and Hell are two words that imply two meanings: the first is for the rewarded, and the other for the punished. Considering the significance of each of these two words, we found out that the word *Jannāt*[4] means the same as the word *bustān* (garden)

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 264.
(2) Qur'ān, 13:35
(3) As-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ*, pp. 65-66.
(4) Plural of *Janna* (paradise.)

which is adorned with fruit trees, odoriferous plants and gushing water. These cause the senses to be calm, restful and composed. Likewise, knowledge and the contribution of the intellect and the soul are the garden of internal perception (*tamyīz*). It has been adorned with the Proclaimers, the Foundations, the Imams and their associates,[1] as well as with their knowledge that flows from them, and with their wisdom, exquisite and delightful, in which the hidden forms[2] find consolation, contentment, rest, intimacy and composure. However, their knowledge, the influx of which flows as such, is still a knowledge mixed with words and verbal expressions. Its reality will only be announced at the time predetermined for that. At that time this knowledge will reach its end, will settle in its purest form and will throw aside its burdens. It will appear in its purest forms and highest rank, in a way «no eye has ever seen and no ear has ever heard, and which has never occurred to the mind of a human being.»[3,4]

Then as-Sijistānī goes on to explain the real meaning of Hell or Eternal Fire. He says:

Fire is used for the welfare of life and the cooking of raw things. Yet it ruins the natural forms and causes them to vanish in a way that you can no longer know what the form of a certain body used to be. Likewise the revealed laws (*ash-sharā'i' an-nāmūsiyya*)[5] are used to put the natural world in good order and to maintain mankind in a virtuous state. Yet, to cling to these laws, when void from knowledge, and to use them as such

(1) See below, pp. 30-31.

(2) This refers to the human souls.

(3) This saying is by the Prophet Muḥammad. See Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol 5, p. 334.

(4) As-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābi'*, p. 67.

(5) This adjective is derived from the word *nāmūs* which means here revelation. See E.W. Lane, *op. cit.*, article ناموس.

will ruin the subtle form[1] and produce doubt and confusion. However, when the revealed Laws appear in their reality, you find them tormenting to the extreme the souls that have been attached only to their literal meaning, in a way «no eye has ever seen, and no ear has ever heard, and which has never occurred to the mind of a human being.»[2]

Hence Paradise is, for the Ismailis, the knowledge of the unity of God. One can reach this stage by following the divine Message that was conveyed by the Proclaimers, the last of whom was Muḥammad, by abiding by the esoteric meaning of this divine Message interpreted by the Foundations, the Imams and their associates, and by observing their teachings. Whereas one goes astray and ends up in Hell, if he discards such knowledge and does away with the truth made by esoteric interpretation. The divine Law will then torment him, and will put him in a state of eternal doubt and confusion, i.e. in a state of eternal chastisement.

Such happiness or chastisement in the afterlife will not, however, be the same for everyone; yet everyone will attain the maximum of happiness or chastisement he is prepared for. «The human souls,» says as-Sijistānī, «desire things according to the purity and rarified state of their real being.»[3] The knowledge a human being can attain and, consequently, the happiness he can reach, depends upon his spiritual preparedness. «The purer,» says as-Sijistānī, «and the more rarified the real being of a man's soul is, the higher and the nobler his desire for attaining the knowledge of the supra sensible things will be. In the same way,» continues as-Sijistānī, «the denser and less pure the real being of a man's soul is, the less and the weaker his desire for attaining the knowledge of the supra sensible things will be. In this respect God said: 'Therein [i.e. in Paradise] is all that

(1) By «the subtle form», al-Kirmānī means the human soul.

(2) As-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābi'*, p. 68.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 70.

souls desire and eyes find sweet and therein you shall dwell forever'.» [1,2]

Happiness is therefore attained through the extent of the knowledge of the unity of God that a man can apprehend. Man's capacity of apprehending the knowledge of the unity of God depends upon his mental and spiritual preparedness. The more a man prepares his soul and his mind to receive the truth, the more knowledge of this truth he can attain. His happiness consequently increases. On the other hand, the less a man prepares his soul and his mind to receive the truth, the less knowledge he is able to receive. If a human being is unprepared to receive the truth, he will be stricken down and overcome by the excessive power of this truth.

(1) Qur'ān, 43:71.
(2) As-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābī'*, p. 70.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STAGES OF KNOWLEDGE

In order that man may reach this knowledge of the unity of God in the purest form and highest rank man can apprehend, and consequently attain eternal happiness «which no eye has ever seen and no ear has ever heard, and which has never occurred to the mind of a human being,» [1] this knowledge must be given to man in stages (*adwār*) according to his spiritual preparedness and the extent of his mental apprehension. Were this knowledge given to man all at once and in its totality he would not be able to apprehend it and, consequently, it would strike him down and «burn him up» in a way «which no eye has ever seen and no ear has ever heard, and which has never occurred to the mind of a human being.»

It is therefore out of God's mercy that this knowledge was given gradually to man and according to the extent (*hadd*) of his apprehension.

As man, in order to be born in this life, needs to pass, according to the Qur'ān, [2] through seven stages, so, the Ismai-

(1) As-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābī'*, p. 24.
(2) This is in reference to the Qur'ānic verses 12-14 of Sūra 23, which says: «We created man of an extraction of clay, then We set him, a drop, in a receptacle secure,
then We created of the drop a clot
then We created of the clot a tissue
then We created of the tissue bones
then We garmented the bones in flesh;
thereafter We produced him as another creature.
So blessed be God, the fairest of creators!»

lis maintain, in order that man may attain the knowledge of the unity of God, by which he is spiritually born (*wilāda rūḥāniyya*), the divine Message, i.e. that which calls for the knowledge of the unity of God (*ʿilm at-tawḥīd*), must also be conveyed to mankind in seven stages or cycles, namely the cycles of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad and finally the cycle of Resurrection which has not come yet.

Every one of the first six cycles had an inceptor who guided mankind to the right path that led to the knowledge of the unity of God, according to man's spiritual readiness and mental apprehension at that time. Each one of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad fulfilled the mission entrusted to him by God. Each one's mission is one step further in the development of the knowledge of the unity of God. Hence, it is inclusive of the degree of knowledge conveyed to mankind in the preceding cycle.

In this way man has been mentally and spiritually developing through the ages. In each of these cycles man was gaining more insight and was increasing his ability to apprehend more and more of the knowledge of the unity of God and, consequently, was augmenting his readiness to receive a larger portion of this divine knowledge.

The seven cycles of the spiritual birth correspond respectively to the seven stages in the development of the human body that are mentioned in the Qur'ānic verses 12-14 of Sūra 23 [1]. The cycle of Adam corresponds to the extraction of clay (*sulāla min ṭīn*), that of Noah to the drop (*nuṭfa*), that of Abraham to the clot (*ʿalaqa*), that of Moses to the tissue (*muḍgha*), that of Jesus to the bones (*ʿiẓām*), that of Muḥammad to the flesh (*laḥm*) and that of the Resurrection to the fetus' coming to light as a new-born creature which is referred to as the «other creature» (*al-khalq al-ākhar*). [2]

The sixth cycle, i.e. that of Muḥammad, is the last cycle in the development of this spiritual *fetus* which is going to become

(1) As-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ*, p. 27, note 2.

(2) See al-Kirmānī, *Risālat Uṣbūʿ Dastr as-Satr*, pp. 61 ff. Also S. Makarem, *ash-Shāfiya*, pp. 42-43 and 183-184.

«the other creature» when born in the seventh cycle, i.e. the cycle of the Resurrection. The cycle of Muḥammad is therefore the last cycle before Resurrection. In this cycle the plain revelation was fully conveyed by Muḥammad. «Today,» speaks God in the Qur'ān, «I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam for your religion.» [1] Thus, the divine Message was conveyed in full and, consequently, it was inclusive of all previous divine Messages.

The divine Message, therefore, was conveyed to mankind in stages, or cycles, in accordance with man's ability to comprehend such knowledge.

Each cycle was headed, as we have seen above, by an inceptor who conveyed to men what they were able to apprehend of the knowledge of the unity of God. Each one of these conveyers of the divine Messages was aided by nine other consignees who helped in teaching the divine Message to mankind according to man's degree of apprehension. These nine, together with the inceptor of the cycle, constitute what the Ismailis call the World of Religion (*ʿālam ad-dīn*). Each one of them corresponds to one Intellect in the Intelligible World (*ʿālam-al-ʿuqūl*), and to one sphere in the physical World (*ʿālam al-jism*).

Al-Kirmānī [2] outlines this esoteric hierarchy of the World of Religion by giving the function of each of the ten consignees, and his corresponding homologue in both the Intellectual World and the physical World. They are:

1. The Conveyer of the Message, or the Proclaimer (*an-nāṭiq*). His function is to proclaim the revelation (*at-tanzīl*). He corresponds to the First Intellect and to the sphere of spheres.

2. The Foundation (*al-asās*). He is so called because he is the foundation of the esoteric interpretation of the revelation

(1) Qur'ān, 5:3.

(2) Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿAql*, pp. 252-256. See also S. Makarem, «The Philosophical Significance of the Imām in Ismāʿīlism,» *Studia Islamica*, vol. 27, (1967), pp. 47-48.

(*at-ta'wīl*). This interpretation reveals the inner knowledge of the revelation (*'ilm al-bāṭin*) which is the true meaning of the divine Message. He corresponds to the Second Intellect, i.e. the Inclusive Soul, and to the sphere of the fixed stars.

3. The Imam. His function is to carry on this inner knowledge and guide the Community along its line. He corresponds to the Third Intellect and to the sphere of Saturn.

These three upper functions are in fact three aspects of one single function, namely that of Imamate in its broader sense, that is, the teaching of the divine Message. This is why al-Kirmānī calls them *al-marātib al-kulliyya*,[1] which means the functions that belong to a whole (*kull*). The other seven functions are, on the other hand, affiliated (*tābi'a*) to the first three. They are:

4. The Gate (*al-bāb*). He is the head teacher in the *da'wa* (movement) who prepares the way to the understanding of the inner knowledge, by deciding the meaning of the divine discourse (*faṣl al-khiṭāb*). He corresponds to the Fourth Intellect and to the sphere of Jupiter.

5. The Proof (*al-ḥujja*). He supervises the missionaries and reveals the exegesis which helps in understanding the esoteric knowledge (*'ilm al-bāṭin*). He corresponds to the Fifth Intellect and to the sphere of Mars.

6. The Missionary of the Message (*dā'ī al-balāgh*). He is in charge of dialectical and eschatological teaching. He corresponds to the Sixth Intellect and to the sphere of the sun.

7. The Missionary-General (*ad-dā'ī al-muṭlaq*). His function is to acquaint the believers with the Intelligible World and to teach them the theoretical worship which is based on the esoteric knowledge. He corresponds to the Seventh Intellect and to the sphere of Venus.

8. The limited Missionary (*ad-dā'ī al-maḥdūd* or *al-maḥṣūr*). His function is to acquaint the believers with the World of Religion and to teach them the practical worship which is based on the

(1) Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'Aql*, p. 252.

exoteric knowledge of the divine Message. He corresponds to the Eighth Intellect and to the sphere of Mercury.

9. The Licensee-General (*al-ma'dhūn al-muṭlaq*). His function is to take the oath and covenant (*al-'ahd wal-mīthāq*) on the proselytes and to teach them the preliminaries of the Faith (*ādāb ad-dīn*). He corresponds to the Ninth Intellect and to the sphere of the moon.

10. The Limited Licensee (*al-ma'dhūn al-maḥdūd* or *al-maḥṣūr*). His function is to preach the doctrine by posing questions and arguments (*mukāsara*), in order to attract the proselytes. He corresponds to the Tenth Intellect and to the sub-lunary sphere of the earth.

Although Adam is the inceptor of the first cycle, he is not considered to be a Proclaimer (*nāṭiq*) of a divine Message, because he was not entrusted with a Message to convey. The Ismaili poem *ash-Shāfiya*, attributed to Shihāb ad-Dīn Abū Firās, says about Adam:

> And there was at his time no Law (*shari'a*)
> nor were there rules (*takālif*) laid down for him.[1]

His cycle is compared to the «extraction of clay» (*sulāla min ṭīn*) in the development of the physical body.[2] In him the *fetus* was not yet formed. It would not be formed before the inception of the second cycle, i.e. that of Noah which is compared to the «drop» (*nuṭfa*) in the development of the physical body.

In this second cycle, the Proclaimer of the Message was Noah. He was the first Messenger to be entrusted with conveying what mankind could comprehend of the knowledge of the unity of God. Speaking about Noah, al-Qāḍī an-Nu'mān says in his book *Ta'wīl ad-Da'ā'im*:

> He is the first Messenger to be sent by God in order to purify man from the breaches and sins which he had committed and in which he fell after Adam (may God bless him). Noah was the first Proclaimer

(1) S. Makarem, *ash-Shāfiya*, pp. 40-41.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[who came] after Adam and the first of the Messengers with constancy (*ʿazm*) who came with a divine Law (*sharīʿa*).[1]

Noah's Foundation (*asās*), who was in charge of interpreting the inner meaning (*al-bāṭin*) of the revelation, was his son Shem. The inner or esoteric meaning of the Message revealed to Noah was carried on by «Imams» of Shem's progeny, until the inception of the third cycle, i.e. the cycle of Abraham.

This third cycle, is compared to the clot (*ʿalaqa*) in the development of the physical body. The Proclaimer of this cycle was Abraham. He was in charge of conveying a further step in the knowledge of the unity of God. As the drop grows up and develops into a clot so mankind develops in understanding the knowledge of the unity of God. This knowledge now grew up a step further as mankind became more prepared to comprehend more of the knowledge of the unity of God.

The Foundation of Abraham, who was in charge of teaching the inner meaning of the Message revealed to Abraham, was his son Ishmael. The teaching of the esoteric meaning was carried on by the «Imams» from among Ishmael's descendants until the fourth cycle, i.e. the cycle of Moses, was due.

This fourth cycle is compared to the tissue (*al-muḍgha*) in the development of the physical body.

The proclaimer of this cycle, who was in charge of conveying a further step in the knowledge of the unity of God, was Moses.

The Imams who carried on the teaching of the esoteric meaning of the Message were from the descendants of Ishmael, son of Abraham. The seed of Imamate continues uninterrupted from father to son. The Fāṭimid Imam al-Muʿizz says in one of his letters: «We pass in the pure backbones (*aṣlāb*) and the sanctified and chaste wombs; whenever we are confined in a backbone and a womb, [God] shows in us power and knowledge and so forth till [the advent of] our great grandfather, the superior

(1) Al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān, *Taʾwīl ad-Daʿāʾim*, p. 51.

father, the lord of Messengers and the master of Prophets, [who is called] Aḥmad and Muḥammad (God's blessings be on him and on his family).»[1] This Imamate was vested by Adam in his son Seth who in turn vested it in his son. Likewise, every Imam would, in turn, vest it in his son. The Imamate thus settles (*istaqarra*) and dwells (*aqāma*) in an uninterrupted series of Imams. Hence the Imam is called, in Ismaili terminology, *mustaqarr* or *muqām*, two nouns of place derived from the verbs *istaqarra* and *aqāma* respectively, i.e. the dwelling place or the Station of Imamate.

As for the Foundation of Moses, he was the brother of Aaron. Since the Imams were of a different line, the Foundation (*asās*) of Moses did not assume the teaching of the inner meaning of the Message. He was rather a chief assistant to the Proclaimer.

The Imams from among the descendants of Ishmael continued to undertake the teaching of the inner meaning of the Message which had been conveyed to Moses until the inception of the fifth cycle, i.e. that of Jesus.

This fifth cycle is compared to the bones (*al-ʿiẓām*) in the development of the physical body.

A further step in the knowledge of the unity of God was conveyed by the Proclaimer of this cycle, i.e. Jesus.

His Foundation (*asās*) who assisted him in conveying his message was Simon Peter.

As for the esoteric meaning of this divine Message, it has continued to be taught by the «Imams» from among the progeny of Ishmael, until the inception of the sixth cycle, i.e. that of Muḥammad.

The sixth cycle, the Proclaimer who was Muḥammad, is compared to the flesh (*al-laḥm*). Now the *fetus* reached its final stage before its coming to light as «the other creature» (*al-khalq al-ākhar*).

(1) Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āẓ al-Ḥunafāʿ*, pp.133-143; and H.I. Hasan and T.A. Sharaf, *al-Muʿizz li-Dīn Allāh*, p. 308.

The coming to light of this spiritual *fetus*, i.e. the knowledge of the unity of God, will be realized on the day of the Resurrection. On this day this spiritual *fetus* will be actualized as «the other creature.»[1]

This implies that the sixth cycle, i.e. that of Muḥammad, is the last cycle in the development of the spiritual birth. Hence the Prophet Muḥammad is the last of the prophets. No Message after his shall be revealed in this life. With the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad the formation of the spiritual *fetus* was completed. The «bones», as in the Qur'ānic verses 12-14 of Sūra 23, are now garmented in flesh. Nothing else is to be added to it. The *fetus* now has only to be prepared in order to come to light as «the other creature».

It is now for the Prophet Muḥammad's Foundation (*asās*), ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and the Imams from among his progeny, to prepare this spiritual *fetus* to come to light and finally to become «the other creature». These Imams, the descendants of Iṣhmael son of Abraham, shall continue, as Imam al-Muʿizz said, «in the pure backbones and the sanctified and chaste wombs until the day of Resurrection.»[2] In the same meaning, Imam al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh also said: «O people, surely God has made us superior by the Word of Imamate. He has eternalized it in us so that it may last until the Day of Doom. The one of us receives it from the other and the son inherits it from the father. This is the bounty of God, He gives it to whomever He wishes, 'and God is of bounty abounding'.[3]»[4]

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 28.
(2) *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
(3) Cf. Qur'ān, 3:74; 8:29; 57:21,29; 62:4.
(4) Abūl-Fawāris Aḥmad ibn Ya'qūb, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, fol. 101.

CHAPTER THREE

PROPHETHOOD AND IMAMATE

As the Prophet Muḥammad was entrusted with completing the conveyance of the plain revelation, proclaiming thus the divine Message in full — as God, say the Ismailis, spoke in the Qur'ān saying, «Today I have perfected your religion for you and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam for your religion.»[1] — so the Prophet's Foundation (*al-asās*), Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and the Imams from among his descendants, believe the Ismailis, were entrusted with conveying the inner or esoteric meaning (*al-bāṭin*) of this revelation to the believers according to the developing conditions of time and society.

«As the Proclaimers», says as-Sijistānī, «comes with a new Law that replaces a previous one, so the Silent[2] comes to subrogate the interpretation of that previous Law. Hence a Proclaimer is inevitably in need of a Silent who is close to him and who is his Foundation.... The Silent must then know, just as the Proclaimer, all the prophetic secret knowledge, so

(1) Qur'ān, 5:3.

(2) The Silent (*aṣ-ṣāmit*) is, in Ismaili terminology, the one in charge of interpreting allegorically the divine Message that was plainly stated by the Proclaimer (*an-nāṭiq*). The Silent conveys these esoteric interpretations to those who are mentally and spiritually capable of comprehending them. His teachings, however, are kept away from those who are mentally and spiritually unprepared to apprehend them. These are only nourished with the plain meaning (*aẓ-ẓāhir*) of the divine Message, which is conveyed by the Proclaimer (*an-nāṭiq*). Hence, in relation to such followers of the faith, the teacher of the esoteric meaning remains silent; hence he is called as such. The Silent is the Legatee (*al-waṣī*) of the Proclaimer, i.e. his Foundation who is entrusted with conveying the esoteric meaning (*al-bāṭin*) of the Message.

that he may help the Proclaimer, assist and support him in implementing the provisions of this knowledge.» [1]

Elaborating more on the functions of both the Messenger and his Foundation, as-Sijistānī continues: «All the people of religious knowledge agree on the fact that God (may He be glorified and exalted) has sent down, within the divine Laws, His divine precepts. These precepts, [however], are brief; they are neither explained nor organized. So the Messenger explained them exoterically and organized them by putting everything into its proper place.» As for the function of the Foundation whom he called the Silent, as-Sijistānī says: «Then he charged the Silent with organizing and explaining them esoterically. This Silent presents to the Proclaimer whatever is appropriate and effective. Hence a cycle can only be complete with two persons: a Silent and a Proclaimer, just as the act of creation was founded on two principles: a *Nāṭiq*, who is the Precedent (*as-sābiq*), and a *Ṣāmit*, who is the Successor (*at-tālī*).» [2]

In another work of his, entitled *al-Yanābīʿ*, as-Sijistnnī gives further elaboration on the function of each of the Proclaimers and the Foundations; he says:

> The Proclaimer is the key to all the words which can be conveyed and which express the perfections of the [First] Intellect and the compositions of the [Inclusive] Soul and which tell about the forms of Spherical beings. By him (i.e. the Proclaimer) all the

(1) As-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt an-Nubuwwāt*, fol. 148. A manuscript in Mr. Moustapha Ghaleb's possession.

(2) *Ibid.*, fol. 148. Here as-Sijistānī compares, as is usually the case in Ismaili literature, the World of Religion with the Intelligible World (*Ibid.*, p. 29). By the Precedent (*as-sābiq*) he means the First Intellect who was the first to come into existence; hence his appellation, the Precedent. By the Successor (*at-tālī*) he means the Second Intellect, or the Inclusive Soul, who came into existence next after the First Intellect (*Ibid.*, p. 19). The First and Second Intellects are here called *Nāṭiq* and *Ṣāmit* respectively, because the First Intellect supplies the Second with knowledge. He conveys, or in other words, he tells (*yanṭiqu*, a verb from which the word *nāṭiq* is derived) this knowledge to the *Ṣāmit* who receives it in turn and cultivates it, just as the female receives the sperm of the male and cultivates it. That is why the Inclusive Soul is sometimes called the wife of the First Intellect (See as-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ*, p. 81).

> systems founded by the divine Law are revealed to mankind from the divine Word. The Foundation (*al-asās*) is the key to all the Intelligible beings, as well as to the compositions of the Inclusive Soul and the systems established by the Proclaimers which have reached him. He is the one who puts everything into its proper place. By him (i.e. the Foundation) all the theosophic interpretations (*at-taʾwīlāt al-ʿilmiyya*) are revealed [to mankind] from the divine Word.[1]

The necessity of Imamate is thus derived from the necessity of Prophethood.

In his invaluable book, entitled *al-Maṣābiḥ fī Ithbāt al-Imā-ma*,[2] al-Kirmānī brings about fourteen points by which he proves the necessity of Imamate. The following is a summary of them.

1. The Messenger was entrusted with conveying the divine Message to all mankind, not only to those who were contemporary to him. Men, on the other hand, are not able to apprehend this Message at once; furthermore, the Messenger, in his limited lifetime, was not able to convey the divine Message to those people who came into existence after his death.

Therefore, an Imam must have been appointed by the Messenger, in order to carry on the Message. Likewise such Imam must appoint a successor to him to continue the guidance of mankind to truth.

2. An Imam must always be present to preserve the divine Message conveyed by the Prophet from distortion and alteration.

3. An Imam must always be present to interpret properly the Qur'ān, the verses of which are liable to be misunderstood in many different ways, due to the fact that Arabic words may have more than one meaning.

4. Since men have different natures and desires, there always should be among them an Imam who would give them

(1) As-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ*, p. 71.

(2) Al-Kirmānī, *al-Maṣābiḥ fī Ithbāt al-Imāma*, pp. 80-95.

the proper judgment, just as the Prophet used to do during his lifetime in conformity with the Qur'ānic verse: «But no, by thy Lord! they will not believe till they make thee the judge regarding the disagreement between them, then they shall find in themselves no impediment touching thy verdict, but shall surrender in full submission.» [1]

5. Since God sent a Messenger to the Community to safeguard it, and since the Community during the Prophet's lifetime was by no means priviledged over any other Community after the Prophet; God must then procure to such Communities an Imam who could safeguard and guide them, as the Prophet used to do regarding the Community during his lifetime.

6. Due to his limited lifetime, the Prophet was not able to call all mankind to Islam, yet God has commanded in the Qur'ān that all mankind be called to Islam. He said, «Call thou to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and good admonition.» [2]

Therefore, an Imam should always be present to undertake this task after the Prophet.

7. Also an Imam should always be present so that he may, after the Prophet, fulfil another divine command mentioned in the Qur'ān: «Take of their wealth a freewill offering, to purify them and to cleanse them thereby.» [3]

8. The ever-presence of an Imam is imperative so that he may look after the *Sharī'a* and implement its enjoinments after the Prophet, especially because of the necessity of implementing the *Sharī'ā* so that disorder among mankind may be avoided.

9. The following Qur'ānic verse, «If you should quarrel on anything, refer it to God and the Messenger,» [4] necessitates the presence of an Imam after the Prophet so that the believers may refer what they have quarrelled on to him.

(1) Qur'ān, 4:65.
(2) *Ibid.*, 16:125.
(3) *Ibid.*, 9:103.
(4) *Ibid.*, 4:59.

10. God said in the Qur'ān, «And whatever you are at variance on, the judgment thereof belongs to God.» [1] He did not say, «Whatever you are at variance on, the judgment thereof belongs to you.» Hence, God forbade the Community to give personal judgments. Therefore, an Imam must be appointed after the Prophet, in order to give his judgment on whatever the Community is at variance on.

11. God also said, «On the day when We shall call all men with their *Imam*...» [2] Therefore, an Imam should at all times be present, or else God's saying would be wrong.

12. By saying, «O believers, obey God, and the Messenger and those in authority among you,» [3] God enjoined on all the believers three things that are complementary to each other, namely, obedience to God, to the Messenger and to those in authority among the Community. Therefore, an Imam who is in authority among the Community must always be present.

13. Since God created the human souls and made them capable of doing what is good and bad, and promised them thereby either reward or punishment, an Imam must then be present at all times, so that he may show the Community the good and the bad, in order that the members of the Community may justly deserve reward or punishment in the afterlife.

14. Since God has entrusted every inanimate thing to someone who is able and knowing by himself. (He entrusted the Spheres, for example, to the Intellects, and the human bodies to the souls), He must therefore entrust the *Sharī'a*, after the Prophet's death, to an Imam so that he may preserve, implement and interpret it.

In this respect the late Imam Sultan Muḥammad Shah, Aga Khan III says:

(1) *Ibid.*, 42:10.
(2) *Ibid.*, 17:71.
(3) *Ibid.*, 4:59.

> The Imam is thus the successor of the Prophet in his religious capacity; he is the man who must be obeyed and who dwells among those from whom he commands spiritual obedience. The Sunnis have always held that his authority is temporal merely and secular, and is exerted only in the political sphere; they believe therefore that it appertains to any lawfully constituted political head of a state, to a Governor or the President of a republic. The Shias say that this authority is all-pervading and is concerned with spiritual matters also, that it is transferred by inherited right to the Prophet's successor of his blood.[1]

Therefore, an «Imam of the time», according to the Ismaili doctrine, must always be present, in order to guide the believers to reality and teach them, each according to his ability to comprehend, the inner meaning, i.e. the esoteric and real indications of the divine Message which was revealed in stages to the Messengers, the Proclaimers, the last of whom was the Prophet Muḥammad, as was shown in the previous chapter.

These Proclaimers conveyed the divine Message to mankind in its exoteric (*ẓāhir*) meaning so that every human being may be guided by it and benefit by the reality it includes.

Therefore, as the Messengers, say the Ismailis, are necessary to proclaim the divine Message (the plain revelation of which was finally conveyed to mankind in full by the Prophet Muḥammad), so an Imam is necessary in every time to guide the believers in the right path indicated in the divine Message. He is also necessary to teach those believers the esoteric (*bāṭin*) meaning of this revelation and the real sense of the divine Message, i.e. the knowledge of the unity of God.

The function of the Proclaimer (*nāṭiq*), i.e. the Messenger, is, therefore, to proclaim the plain revelation (*tanzīl*). The function of the Imam is the esoteric interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of this plain revelation. It is also the reaching of the inner meaning (*'ilm*

(1) Aga Khan III, *The Memoirs of Aga Khan*, pp. 178-179.

al-bāṭin) of the divine Message and the guidance of the believers along the right path (*aṭ-ṭarīqa*), according to the developing conditions of time and human society, as it was mentioned above. In this respect al-Qāḍī an-Nu'mān says:

> [God] brings down one single thing having an outer meaning and an inner one. He (to whom belongs glory and power) made its outer meaning the miracle of His Messenger, and its inner meaning the miracle of the Imams from among his family, which inner meaning is only found with them. No one can convey the outer meaning of the Book except their grandfather, Muḥammad, the Messenger of God (God's blessing and peace be on him), and no one can convey its inner meaning except the Imams from among his progeny. It is a knowledge abundant among them and deposited in them. They use it in addressing every people according to what they understand; they give it to those of every level (*ḥadd*) according to what they deserve; they withhold it from those who must be avoided, and they prevent from it those who deserve to be held back. This is according to the saying of the All-mighty, the All-giving, «This is Our gift; bestow or withhold without reckoning.[1]»[2]

Thus, as Prophethood is concerned with the *Ẓāhir*, Imamate is concerned with the *Bāṭin*. Consequently, one can only attain the knowledge of the *Bāṭin* through the *Ẓāhir*.

This, however can only be realized in the light of the continuous developing conditions of time and the spiritual and cultural development of mankind. In a message delivered in Karachi, the present Imam Karim Shah al-Husayni, the Aga Khan, said to his followers:

> It is very hard indeed to go through one's history without questioning things, and I am particularly

(1) Qur'ān, 38:39.
(2) Al-Qāḍī an-Nu'mān, *Asās at-Ta'wīl*, pp. 31-32.

> pleased that you should do this work, that you as my chief spiritual children should go through your own history and try to understand the development which has happened, so that you can explain to your children what is the meaning of Imam and what is the meaning of faith. They will have a harder world to live in than you will and your understanding must guide them. Your understanding of your faith must guide them to their understanding of their faith and so it must always be. [1]

This outlook on faith is what prompted the late Aga Khan III to say: «Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook There have really been», continues the Aga Khan, «no cut-and-dried rules, even the set of regulations known as the Holy Laws are directions as to the method and procedure and not detailed orders about results to be obtained.» [2]

In support of this role of the Imam the Ismailis quote the following saying by the Prophet Muḥammad: «He who dies without knowing the Imam of his time when alive, dies in ignorance.» [3]

From what has been mentioned, we can say that Prophethood, which is concerned with the proclamation of the plain revelation, presupposes the necessity of Imamate which is concerned with the teaching of the inner meaning of that revelation and the guidance of the believers on the right path according to the changing demand of a human society developing socially, scientifically, culturally and spiritually. This presupposition of Imamate, argue the Ismailis, is what the Prophet Muḥammad meant when he said, «Verily ʿAlī is from me and I am from him,» [1] or when he said at the Pond (*Ghadīr*) of Khumm, on his way back from the Farewell Pilgrimage, «He whose master (*mawlā*) I am, ʿAlī is his master. O God, help whomever helps him, oppose whomever opposes him, forsake whomever forsakes him, and turn the right to whatever direction he turns.» [2]

(1) *Africa Ismaili*, New Series, vol. 1, no. 12 (May 16, 1969), p. 6.

(2) Aga Khan III, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

(3) Al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, vol. 1, pp. 31, 34; Abūl-Fawāris Aḥmad ibn Yaʿqūb, fol. 83.

Accordingly, the Imam is to the Ismailis he who guides the believers to true knowledge, i.e. the knowledge of the unity of God (*ʿilm at-tawḥīd*), through which knowledge man can realize himself as such. Through this knowledge, therefore, man reaches his perfection.

This knowledge is, to the Ismailis, God's Word that he willed. Now, in order that man be guided through the right path (*at-ṭarīqa*) he should be enlightened by this divine Word. It is to him the ultimate knowledge by which he reaches perfection and realizes himself, as has been mentioned above. Now, the Imam is man's guide along the right path (*aṭ-ṭarīqa*) which leads to the knowledge of the unity of God, that is, to truth (*al-ḥaqīqa*). This truth was revealed in full to the Prophet Muḥammad, who was entrusted with conveying its outer meaning to mankind in the form of a divine Law (*Sharīʿa*); which the Imam was entrusted in conveying its inner meaning, according to man's preparedness. Hence, the Imam is the example that must be followed so that one may attain the knowledge of the unity of God. Knowledge is only possible through him. He is the gate through which man can attain this knowledge of the unity of God. This is what led the Prophet to say about Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, namely, «I am the city of knowledge and ʿAlī is its gate. He who desires [to enter] the city, let him come through the gate.» [3] Interpreting the Qur'ānic verse 35 of

(1) Al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

(2) Abūl-Fawāris Aḥmad ibn Yaʿqūb, *op. cit.*, fol. 38. See also al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, vol. 1, p. 21.

(3) Abūl-Fawāris Aḥmad ibn Yaʿqūb *op. cit.*, fols. 89, 92. Also see Jaʿfar ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-Kashf*, pp. 105, 129.

Sūra 24, «God is the Light of the heavens and of the earth...,» the author of *Kitāb al-Kashf* (probably the Ismaili *dā'ī* Ja'far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman who flourished about the middle of the fourth century A.H. / tenth century A.D.) said: «[God's] Light in the Heavens is His guidance, His Light on the earth is the Imam by whom one is guided.» [1]

The following saying by Imam Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq explains the position of the Imam in the Ismaili faith. He says: «God is worshiped through us, and through us He is either obeyed or disobeyed: he who obeys us obeys God, and he who disobeys us disobeys God. Our obedience was preceded by an intention of God's concerning His creatures, namely that He shall accept no deed from anyone unless it is through us, and that He shall chastise no one unless it is through us. We are the gate of God, His evidence, the guarantors of His creatures, the keepers of his secret and the depositories of His knowledge.» [2]

This, however, does not elevate the office of Imamate over that of Prophethood. As it has been shown above [3] the Proclaimer of the divine Message (*an-nāṭiq*) i.e. the Prophet, corresponds to the First Intellect, while his Foundation (*al-asās*), known also as the Silent (*aṣ-ṣāmit*) [4] or as the Legatee (*al-waṣī*),[5] corresponds to the Second Intellect; the Imams who come after the Foundation correspond to the Third Intellect.

Al-Kirmānī explains the relation between the office of Prophethood, held by a Prophet, and the office of the Legatee (*al-wiṣāya*) in his epistle entitled *ar-Risāla al-Waḍiyya*. He says:

(1) Ja'far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

(2) Al-Qāḍī an-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, vol. 1, p. 72. See also al-Qāḍī an-Nu'mān, *al-Himma fī Adāb Atbā' al-A'imma*, pp. 78-79.

(3) *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 35, note 2.

(5) A Legatee (*waṣī*) is an Imam. He is the one to whom the Legacy of Imamate is bequeathed. Imam Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq related that the Prophet said: «I am the Master of the Prophets, my Legatee is the master of the Legatees, and his Legatees are the masters of the Legatees.» (Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, *Man Lā Yaḥduruhu al-Faqīh*, p. 401.)

> The office of the Legatee (*al-wiṣāya*) serves that of Prophethood (*an-nubuwwa*). *Nubuwwa* and *wiṣāya* are two principles similar to each other, since they are both a grace from God (exalted be He). They both exist by virtue of their ends. God (exalted be He) said, «It behoves not the sun to overtake the moon, neither does the night outstrip the day, each swimming in a sky.»[1] They are only distinguished from each other by their essential characters and ranks, just as the sun and the moon. From a physical point of view they resemble each other, yet from the point of view of light one excels the other. *Nubuwwa*, which is the office of the Messenger (*risāla*), is like the master, *wiṣāya* is like the servant. However *nubuwwa*, or *risāla*, can only be effective by *wiṣāya*. In the same way *wiṣāya* exists only by virtue of the existence of *risāla*. This is because *risāla*, or *nubuwwa*, consists of divine blessings flowing over the Messenger, and of a power which unites with him so that he may be able to receive the revelation allotted to him to convey, as we explained in our book entitled *Rāḥat al-'Aql*. Hence the Messenger is able to give the souls an existence with which they can be saved from the unreality of nature, and with which their reality can be preserved. Its state of being, I mean in its totality, is the divine blessings which are conveyed by the Messenger (may God bless him) who is the Prophet (may he be blessed) by means of what he says and does. [2]

Following as-Sijistānī,[3] al-Kirmānī then compares Prophethood to a great fire which one can only get close to by means of a device that protects him from its blaze and helps him make use of it. Imamate is to Prophethood as this device is

(1) Qur'ān, 36:40.

(2) Al-Kirmānī, *ar-Risāla al-Waḍiyya fī Ma'ālim ad-Dīn*, fols. 24-25. A manuscript in Mr. Moustapha Ghaleb's possession.

(3) As-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābī'*, pp. 24-25.

to fire. By interpreting and explaining the divine Message, the Imam protects the believers from being struck down by the intensity and power of truth that Prophethood has. Imamate regulates thus this intensive power and makes man able to benefit from the knowledge that was revealed to the Prophet.[1]

According to what al-Kirmānī says, we can conclude that by allegorically interpreting the divine Message according to the degree of the believers' comprehension, the Imam acts in fact as a regulator to this immense knowledge revealed to the Prophet who in turn conveyed it to mankind. As a transformer regulates the voltage of an electric current so that an appliance of a lesser voltage would not burn out, so the Imam regulates the divine knowledge conveyed by the Messenger, lest it burn the believers and destroy them.

It is therefore imperative, according to the Ismaili doctrine, to have present at all times an Imam who puts, as al-Kirmānī says, every knowledge of the divine Message «into its right place by means of allegorical interpretation and explanation [guiding the believers] along the way of temperance.» [2]

Thus, the plain revelation, that was conveyed to mankind by a series of Messengers, the last of whom was Muḥammad, is too strong to be comprehended as such by the human mind. It needs to be adapted and adjusted to the human mind according to man's mental and spiritual development. This adaptation and adjustment can only be realized by the Imam who, because of his insight and knowledge of the divine Message, can give the believers what they can comprehend of this divine Revelation. This is done by the allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the divine Message made known in full to the prophets by revelation (*tanzīl*) and to the Imams who are, as Imam Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq says, «the keepers of [God's] secret and the depositories of His knowledge.» [3]

(1) Al-Kirmānī, *ar-Risāla al-Wadiyya*, fol. 25.
(2) *Ibid.*, fol. 25.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 50.

It is the Imam therefore who, by his own insight, knows what is appropriate to the believers, according to their spiritual and cultural qualifications and the conditions of time and society. In justification to his appointing his grandson to the Imamate after him, the late Imam of the Nizārī Ismailis, Sultan Muḥammad Shah, Aga Khan III says in his will: «In view of the fundamentally altered conditions in the world in very recent years, due to the great changes which have taken place, including the discoveries of atomic science, I am convinced that it is in the interest of the Shia Muslim Ismaili community that I should be succeeded by a young man who has been brought up and developed during recent years and in the midst of the new age and who brings a new outlook on life to his office as Imam.» [1]

1) *Africa Ismaili*, (Imamate Day Number), vol. 2. no.1 (August 1, 1969), p. 29.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXOTERIC KNOWLEDGE AND ESOTERIC KNOWLEDGE

From what has been mentioned in the previous chapter, we see that in order for man to profit from the divine Message, he must follow the teachings of the Imams. They give him what he can apprehend of the divine Message revealed by God to the Proclaimers. Thus man should first attain complete surrender (*islām*) to the divine Message so that he may go ahead in the path of knowledge according to his potential ability and his mental and spiritual preparedness, guided by the Imam of the time (*imām az-zamān*). The latter adds to man's acknowledgment of the divine Message (*iqrār*) the knowledge (*maʿrifa*) that he is fit to attain. With this knowledge, added to his acknowledgment of the divine Message, man advances from mere *islām*, which is acknowledgment (*iqrār*), to *īmān* as such, which is, as Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib said, «both acknowledgment (*iqrār*) and knowledge (*maʿrifa*)».[1]

This knowledge, which is taught by the Imams and which is given to the believers according to their mental and spiritual ability, is the esoteric knowledge of the divine Message. It thus varies from time to time according, as we have said, to man's preparedness and potentialities. Had the divine Message been revealed to mankind in full, without being tempered with allegorical interpretation (*taʿwīl*) by the Imams, this divine Message

(1) *Africa Ismaili*, (Imamate Day Number), *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

would then have been of no use to man. In fact man would have been struck down by the power of this divine Message, as has been shown in the previous chapter. [1] «Had it not been for allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) which puts all that has been stated in the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) [approach to the knowledge of the divine Message] into its proper place and supports it,» says al-Kirmānī, «then this exoteric knowledge (*ẓāhir*) would have caused more death than life. That is why God called the people of exoterism who left the theoretical worship (*al-ʿibāda al-ʿilmiyya*), the dead people; He said (exalted be He), 'Dead not alive' [2] also said He, 'Respond to God and the Messenger when He calls you into that which will give you life' [3]. Thus, by moderating the divine Message, exoterically stated [by the Proclaimers], allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) produces life. This is because of the extent of power the divine Message has, and its being of no avail if taken in its pure form. What the Proclaimers have stated,» continued al-Kirmānī, «is of extreme power and excess. It can by no means be understood without being moderated with explanation and allegorical interpretation.» [4]

Hence the divine Message proclaimed by the Messenger can only be beneficial to man if it is moderated by allegorical interpretation that leads to esoteric knowledge (*ʿilm al-bāṭin*). By the same token, esoteric knowledge can only be realized if it is founded on exoteric knowledge (*ʿilm aẓ-ẓāhir*). It is the result of the allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the plain revelation (*tanzīl*) of the divine Message.

The knowledge which results from this interpretation must therefore depend on the same principles that exoteric knowledge (*ẓāhir*) depends on. In order to attain such knowledge man must therefore follow the same practices that are prescribed in the *Sharīʿa*, and consequently formulated in the exoteric approach (*ẓāhir*) of the plain revelation.

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 46.
(2) Qur'ān, 16:21.
(3) *Ibid.*, 8:24.
(4) Al-Kirmānī, *ar-Risāla al-Waḍiyya*, fols. 25-26.

Hence the worship of God by means of knowledge, i.e. the theoretical or esoteric worship (*al-ʿibāda al ʿilmiyya*), presupposes the practicing of all the religious obligations prescribed by the *Sharīʿa*, i.e. the practical or exoteric worship (*al-ʿibāda al-ʿamaliyya*). By observing these obligations the human soul is cultivated and becomes more receptive to knowledge. «Practical worship,» [i.e. exoteric worship], as al-Kirmānī says in his book *Rāḥat al-ʿAql*, «is the worship which should first be in force while following the road leading to Paradise. This is because», continues al-Kirmānī, «it strengthens the human soul and trains it in acquiring the ethical virtues which act as a succor to the rational virtues. These rational virtues provide the human soul with the other kind of worship which is actualized with knowledge.» [1]

The religious obligations imposed by the *Sharīʿa* are therefore a means by which man's soul is trained to receive more of the esoteric knowledge (*bāṭin*) of the divine Message. Accordingly, the *Sharīʿa* leads the human being to the path of knowledge (*aṭ-ṭarīqa*) which in turn leads him to truth (*al-ḥaqīqa*). Practical or exoteric worship (*al-ʿibāda al-ʿamaliyya*) is therefore the concern of the *Sharīʿa*, while theoretical worship (*al-ʿibāda al-ʿilmiyya*) is the concern of the *ṭarīqa*. The *ṭarīqa* in turn is the only path to the *ḥaqīqa*.

Both kinds of worship, i.e. observing the religious obligations imposed by the *Sharīʿa* (*al-ʿibāda al-ʿamaliyya*) and endeavoring for more knowledge of the unity of God (*al-ʿibāda al-ʿilmiyya*), are elucidated in al-Kirmānī's book entitled *ar-Risāla al-Waḍiyya*. He defines theoretical worship as follows:

> The worship of knowledge is of many kinds. The first, which is the noblest and for which the Messengers (peace be on them) were sent and the Holy Books were revealed, and by which salvation is attained, is the knowledge of the oneness of God. The second kind consists of knowing the angels and knowing the

(1) Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿAql*, p. 119.

Prophets, Legatees and Imams (may God's peace be on them), who guide mankind to the knowledge of God's unity according to what He has prescribed. This is what the true believers should believe in, according to God's saying, «The Messenger believes in what was sent down to him from his Lord, and likewise the believers; each one believes in God and His angels, and in His Books and his Messengers.»[1] [The third consists of] knowing what they brought forth in the Books, Laws, rules, regulations and in the wisdom of their theosophic interpretations. [Other kinds] are knowing what they taught about Heaven, Hell, Resurrection, Judgment, Reward, Punishment and the Day of Doom (in which the believer must have faith that his belief be complete); then knowing the different ranks of existing beings, both intelligible and physical, as they are in reality, according to the explanations given by the bearers of the wisdom of allegorical interpretation (*at-ta'wīl*). [2]

About practical or exoteric worship, al-Kirmānī says the ollowing:

As theoretical worship, the worship which is performed by observing the religious obligations, [i.e. the exoteric worship] is also of several aspects. The first and the noblest is to confess the oneness of God, i.e. to witness that there is no God but God and that Muḥammad is His servant and Messenger. The second is to confess that Heaven, Hell and Resurrection are true, and to confess that «the Hour is coming, no doubt of it, and God shall raise up whosoever is within tombs».[3] Others are to perform the prayers, pay the alms, fast all the month of Ramaḍān, make the Pilgrimage to

(1) Qur'ān, 2:285.

(2) Al-Kirmānī, *ar-Risāla al-Waḍiyya*, fol. 8.

(3) Qur'ān, 22:7.

the sacred House and struggle in God's way; then do whatever the Imam — the lieutenant of God (may He be exalted) and the descendant of the Prophet, who is an Imam by the Prophet's appointment and choice — commands [you to do] for the protection of Islam and its followers, follow the commandments and rules which the Prophet (may God bless him) has urged us to follow and called us to obey, and adopt the commended ethical virtues, such as humbleness, clemency, piety, honesty, justice, veracity, courage and generosity, and avoid the opposite of all these virtues.

By observing these practices one will be worshiping God. In the afterlife, they are likely to raise the ranks of those who perform them. God (may He be exalted) said, «Unto Him good works ascend, and the pious deed does He exalt.[1]»[2]

This congruity of both the theoretical (esoteric) and practical (exoteric) kinds of worship in Ismailism is clearly expounded by the late Imam Aga Khan III. Worshiping God, he believes, can only be true and, consequently, valid by observing these two kinds of worship. In this respect he says:

... But having known the real, the Absolute, having understood the Universe as an infinite succession of events, intended by God, we need an ethic, a code of conduct in order to be able to elevate ourselves towards the ideal demanded by God.[3]

Then the late Imam speaks about the religious obligations. He considers them a means to elevate the human soul. He says:

Prayer is a daily necessity, a direct communication of the spark with the universal flame. Reasonable fasting for a month in every year, provided a man's

(1) *Ibid.*, 35:10.

(2) Al-Kirmānī, *ar-Risāla al-Waḍiyya*, fols. 9-10.

(3) Aga Khan III, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

> health is not impaired thereby, is an essential part of the body's discipline, through which the body learns to renounce all impure desires. Adultery, alcoholism, slander, and thinking evil of one's neighbour are specifically and severely condemned. All men, rich and poor, must aid one another materially and personally. The rules vary in detail, but they all maintain the principle of universal mutual aid in the Muslim fraternity. This fraternity is absolute and comprises men of all colours and all races: black, white, yellow, tawny; all are the sons of Adam in the flesh and all carry in them a spark of the Divine light. Everyone should strive his best to see that this spark be not extinguished but rather developed to that full «Companionship – on – High» which was the vision expressed in the last words of the Prophet on his deathbed, the vision of that blessed state which he saw clearly awaiting him. [1]

The above passage embodies all the pillars of Islam that a follower of the Ismaili Imam must abide by to be a true believer. [2] The late Aga Khan III first mentioned the necessity of prayer. Second, he urged his followers to fast for a month in every year. Needless to say, he meant the month of Ramaḍān. Third, he emphasized the necessity of Purification (*ṭahāra*): no adultery, alcoholism, slander or thinking evil of one's neighbor. Fourth, he urged all his followers, whether rich or poor, to aid one another both materially and personally. Here he meant to emphasize the necessity of Alms Giving (*zakāt*). Fifth, he spoke of fraternity which comprises men of all colors and races. It is this fraternity at which Pilgrimage aims, where every Muslim is supposed to meet his fellow Muslim on an equal basis. Finally, the Aga Khan spoke of the Struggle in God's way (*jihād*); he urged everyone of his followers to « strive his best» to keep the «spark of the Divine light» unextinguished and to see it «developed to that full 'Companionship-on-high'.»

(1) *Ibid.*
(2) For the pillars of Islam, *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Both soul and body should take part in the worship of God. One can only be drawn near to God if he endeavors to do so by devoting both his body and soul to the Good. The late Imam Aga Khan III concludes:

> After death divine justice will take into consideration the faith, the prayers, and the deeds of man. For the chosen, there is eternal life and the spiritual felicity of the Divine vision. For the condemned, there is hell where they will be consumed with regret for not having known how to merit the grace and the blessing of Divine mercy. [1]

By combining faith to the practices and deeds of man, the late Imam Aga Khan III is simply stressing the importance of both ways of worship, i.e. the practical and the theoretical ways, in determining man's eternal salvation and felicity.

When Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib defined *islām* as acknowledgment (*iqrār*),[2] he simply meant the professing of the tenets of practical worship (*al-ʿibāda al-ʿamaliyya*) as we have seen them above[3] defined by al-Kirmānī. In distinguishing between *islām* (surrender) and *īmām* (belief, faith), Imam ʿAlī defined belief as being both acknowledgment and knowledge. This clearly means that man can only be a true believer if he first practices *islām*. This is what al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān meant when he said, «At the time of his initiation, the believer must not start with esoteric knowledge (*bāṭin*). He must first know the exoteric knowledge (*ẓāhir*). He must start with learning the *ẓāhir* as it was announced by the Imams who took it from the Messenger of God (may God's blessing and peace be on him). After he is taught what he must know of the exoteric knowledge (*ẓāhir*),» continues al-Kirmānī, «esoteric knowledge (*bāṭin*) will then be disclosed to him.» [4]

(1) Aga Khan III, *op. cit.*, p. 177.
(2) *Ibid.*, p. 13.
(3) *Ibid.*, pp. 51-53.
(4) Al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān, *Taʾwīl ad-Daʿāʾim*, vol. 1, p. 57.

An-Nuʿmān then explains: «*Islām* is like the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) approach to knowledge, while *īmān* is like the esoteric (*bāṭin*) approach.» He continues, «From whomever does not first follow the religion of *islām*, must not be exacted the promise of *īmān*.» An-Nuʿmān warns that such a man «must not be elevated to the rank he desires unless the promise of *islām* is first exacted from him, that is to say, he must first acknowledge the Messenger, enter into his *Sharīʿa* and be acquitted from anything contrary to that. If he does so, he then becomes a *muslim*. From him will be exacted thereby the promise of *īmān*. Only at that time will the knowledge of his Imam be disclosed to him. Thereupon he rises into the ranks of Belief, but only after he is taught the true exoteric knowledge (*az-ẓāhir*).» [1]

Hence, one must first be a *muslim*, that is, he must first abide by the religious obligations imposed by the *Sharīʿa* and surrender to the tenets of *islām*, before he can understand the true meaning of the divine Message. In other words, one must surrender to the truth before he can know it in its reality. «No one,» says al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān, «can rise to the level of esoteric knowledge (*al-bāṭin*), if he does not first know the exoteric knowledge (*az-ẓāhir*).»[2] Accordingly, «*īmān* includes *islām* whereas *islām* does not include *īmān*.» [3]

It follows that one's true belief (*īmān*) can only be realized by combining both the exoteric (*az-ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*al-bāṭin*) approaches to knowledge. «When the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin* act together and are both observed and practiced,» concludes an-Nuʿmān, «then a pure and true belief (*īmān*) results... Knowledge, therefore, matures into real belief, only if it is perfected by the performing of religious obligations.» [4]

It is therefore incumbent on every believer, according to the Ismaili doctrine, to follow both the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*,

(1) *Ibid.*
(2) *Ibid.*
(3) *Ibid.*
(4) *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

that is to approach knowledge and follow the divine Message both exoterically and esoterically. «One must not,» affirms al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān, «engage in only one of them and discard the other. He must undertake them both. The one is only valid with the other.» [1]

In the highly esoteric book entitled *Kitāb al-Kashf*, attributed to the Ismaili *dāʿī* Jaʿfar ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman, an esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ānic verse 233 of Sūra 2 supports the necessity of following both the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*. The Qur'ānic verse goes as follows: «Mothers shall suckle their children two years completely, for such as desire to fulfil the suckling. It is for the father to provide them and clothe them honourably.» The author of *Kitāb al-Kashf* interprets this verse by saying: «This means that the *dāʿīs* and the Gates must guide the believers to follow two kinds of Imams: one who proclaims (*nāṭiq*) a divine Law and conveys a revelation, and another who completes the divine Law by interpreting it esoterically.» [2]

This is further expounded in the same book as follows:

> Practicing [the religious obligations] and knowing [the divine Message] are the exoteric and the esoteric aspects of God's religion. The practices are like the body, while the soul corresponds to knowledge. Just as the soul and the body supplement each other, so are knowledge and the practices supplementary.» [3]

When interpreting the Qur'ānic verse, «And a wall shall be set up between them, having a door in the inward where-of is mercy, and against the outward thereof is chastisement,»[4] the same author says:

> The wall means the Book of God (to Him belong glory and power). The door refers to every Imam of the

(1) *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.
(2) Jaʿfar ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165.
(3) *Ibid.*, p. 112.
(4) Qur'ān, 57:13.

time. [The saying], «In the inward whereof is mercy,» denotes the esoteric knowledge (*ʿilm al-bāṭin*) which, with the permission of God, is open by the Imam to those who deserve God's mercy due to their sincerity and good will. The Imam gives them of God's mercy what is enough to strengthen their certitude (*yaqīn*) and save their souls. [The saying], «Against the outward thereof is chastisement,» means that whoever disregards the exoteric impositions (*farāʾiḍ az-ẓāhir*) will be chatised and will not profit from esoteric knowledge (*al-bāṭin*). On the other hand, he who observes only the exoteric meaning (*az-ẓāhir*) [of the divine Message] without observing the esoteric meaning (*al-bāṭin*), will also be chastised, because he does not hold fast to what God has ordered him to adhere to with the most firm handle, by having his soul know [the esoteric knowledge] and having his body practice [the exoteric impositions], and by following the Legatee after the Messenger, and [engaging in] the esoteric knowledge (*al-bāṭin*) after [the exoteric aspect (*az-ẓāhir*)] of the plain revelation. The reality of this esoteric knowledge only becomes manifest to those who seek it. As for him who complies with the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) approach to the Messenger's teaching and disregards the *bāṭin* which the Messenger taught his Legatee, «his work has failed, and in the world to come he shall be among the losers.[1]» [2]

This is what the present Imam Prince Karim Aga Khan meant when he said addressing his followers:

I want you as in the past to say your prayers regularly, to teach your children not only their faith and how they should understand it but also how it

(1) *Ibid.*, 5:5.

(2) Jaʿfar ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

should be practiced. I would like the parents of my spiritual children, of my young spiritual children, to make it their duty to teach the faith to their children and to teach it in the most correct form. I would like my Jamats to remember that without this there is no point in doing any work whatsoever.[1]

From what has been stated we may conclude that the Ismaili doctrine attaches much importance to both the observance of the religious obligations imposed by the *Sharīʿa* and the knowledge of the faith in a way that is appropriate with man's readiness and ability to apprehend the divine truth, and with the conditions of time and society. Belief *īmān*, which was defined by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib as being both acknowledgment and knowledge,[2] can only be achieved first and foremost by practicing *Islām*, that is to say, by fulfilling the tenets of Islam and performing the duties imposed on all the Muslims, especially those pillars on which Islam was built and by means of which the divine Message is fulfilled within man himself. One can only attain what he can apprehend of the knowledge of truth, that is the knowledge of the unity of God Who embraces in an undivided all-inclusive unity the whole existence beyond which nothing else exists, one can only attain the amount he can apprehend of such knowledge, if he first acknowledges this truth, loves it and performs all the ways and means that lead to the acquisition of the degree of knowledge he can apprehend . This degree is determined by the extent of the individual's preparedness and capacity, and by what the conditions of time and society allow.

By the acquisition of the individual's degree of knowledge, which differs from one person to the other and from one time to the other, each individual then attains an ever-lasting happiness «which no eye has ever seen and no ear has ever heard, and which has never occurred to the mind of a human being.» [3]

(1) *Africa Ismaili*, New Series, vol. 1. no. 12 (May 16, 1969), p. 5.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 13.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 24.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SHIA IMAMI ISMAILIS TODAY

The followers of the Aga Khan, known as the Shia Imami Ismailis, are scattered in various parts of the world. In the words of H.H. Karim Shah, the Aga Khan:

> The Ismailis today live in 22 different countries: Persia, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Kuwait in the Middle East; Afghanistan, Pakistan, Hunza, India, Burma, Malaya and Ceylon in Asia; Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, the Congo, South Africa, Madagascar and Portuguese Mozambique in Africa. Together with Russian Turkestan and Communist China, they number in all around 20 million. It is impossible for me to be more precise about the number as I do not have a community census, nor do the governments hold national censuses in many of the states I have mentioned.
>
> Ismailis are most easily divided in terms of occupation rather than language or nationality. Thus in Syria, Iran, Hunza and Afghanistan farming is the community's principle source of income, whereas in India, Pakistan and East Africa — as indeed throughout most of the Commonwealth — the Ismailis are for the most part retail traders and industrialists.[1]

(1) From a speech by H.H. Karim Shah on «Ismaili Community and its Contribution to the Commonwealth,» at Oxford, on the 2nd of November, 1960. *Africa Ismaili,* New Series, vol. 1, no. 8 (April 18, 1969), p. 1.

In almost all the countries they live in, the Shia Imami Ismailis lead a prosperous life. The late Aga Khan III and the present Imam Karim Aga Khan have encouraged cooperative enterprises undertaken by their followers. «In both India and Africa,» says J.N. Hollister, «the funds collected for the Diamond Jubilee, 1946, less the expenses of the celebrations, were invested in Diamond Jubilee Trusts.»[1] Many projects undertaken by the Ismailis are financed in part from these trusts.[2] (In recognition to their late Imam Aga Khan III, the Ismailis have collected his weight with gold, with diamonds and with platinum, several times. He was weighed in 1954, for the last time in Cairo, against platinum). The sums of money raised on these occasions have been allocated for the social, cultural, health and economical welfare of the Community, and not for the Aga Khan's personal fortune, contrary to the belief of many outsiders.

However, such ceremonies which were held in honor of the late Aga Khan III are not a part of the Ismaili tradition. The present Imam appears not to be encouraging similar ceremonies being held for himself as such as those that had been held for the late Aga Khan, his grandfather.

It is true the Aga Khan's personal income is high. «Perhaps not many people,» explained the late Aga Khan, «in view of the incidence of taxation, even in the United States, have the control over an income that I exercise; but this control carries with it — as an unwritten law — the upkeep of all the various communal, social, and religious institutions of my Ismaili following.»[3]

Besides looking after his own followers the Aga Khan is keenly interested in advancing the cause of Islam at large. The East African Muslim Welfare Society is indeed indebted to his endeavors to make it fulfil its mission in promoting the cause of Islam.

(1) J.N. Hollister, *The Shi'a of India*, p. 398.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 398.

(3) Aga Khan III, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

Usually the Ismailis finance their projects from the following sources:

1. Personal contributions from the Aga Khan. These contributions are usually made available by the Aga Khan from the *khums* (tithe) paid by the Ismailis to their Imam according to the usual Islamic ordinance of Alms Giving (*zakāt*).

2. The funds raised in private and general meetings held on different occasions, such as feasts and celebrations.

3. The Wills of the deceased.

4. Other donations given by Ismailis on various occasions.[1]

The projects financed in part by these funds include cooperative societies, corporations, building societies, medical and educational institutions.[2]

In Pakistan a company has been established by the name of «Industrial Promotion Services of Pakistan Limited.» A similar company has also been established in East Africa, called «East African Industrial Promotion Services.» Both companies have been fostered by H.H. Karim Aga Khan. They aim at assisting in realizing the industrial and commercial opportunies of the Pakistani and East African markets. Both companies participate in new projects with local or foreign business companies. They also establish and manage new projects and assist existing businesses

Furthermore, in 1967, the Aga Khan instituted an international fund known as the «Aga Khan Foundation».

In the educational field the Aga Khan has contributed a great deal for the promotion of scholarship and learning. Apart from generous grants to various world universities, he has founded and contributed plentifully to many educational institutions including primary and secondary schools, as well as colleges, universities and medical centers.

(1) This information has been furnished by Mr. Moustapha Ghaleb.

(2) J.N. Hollister, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

Furthermore, «there is,» as J.N. Hollister tells us, «a 'Mission Department' which is presumably responsible for the missionary work of the sect.»[1]

Thus the Shia Imami Ismailis are well organized under the spiritual leadership of the Imam of the time. In India, Pakistan and Africa they are organized in a hierarchical system of councils, and, as J.N.D. Anderson says, «It is clear that a great deal of consultation takes place, normally at least, before an authoritative ruling is promulgated in the form of a 'Holy Firman'.»[2]

It is within the core of the Ismaili doctrine that the Imam guides his followers according to the developing conditions of time and society.[3] This outlook is what made Ismailism fluid, according to the Aga Khan III.[4] « Difficult though it is for an outsider,» says J.N.D. Anderson, «to understand how educated people can recognize the Ismaili doctrine of the Imamate with the cultural, Western-educated and essentially 'human' gentlemen who have recently succeeded to that office, it is precisely because such persons occupy a position of such towering authority that the most radical changes in their law have proved so simple to effect.»[5] This is what happened in fact. In 1899 — or possibly 1905 — for example, the late Aga Khan issued a written set of rules for his community in East Africa. They were called *The Rules of the Shia Imamia Councils of the Continent of Africa.* These rules, however, were revised in 1937. They were revised for the second time in 1946 to be reissued under the title, *Constitution, Rules and Regulations of His Highness the Aga Khan Ismailia Councils of Africa.* In 1954, they were again revised to remain in effect until 1962 when they all were revoked and replaced by *The Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismailis in*

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 398.

(2) J.N.D. Anderson, «The Ismaʿili Khojas of East Africa,» *Middle Eastern Studies,* vol. 1, no 1 (Oct. 1964), p. 23.

(3) *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

(4) Aga Khan III, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

(5) J.N.D. Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

Africa.[1] This Constitution was ordained on the 26th of June, 1962[2], and came into operation on the 11th of August of the same year.[3] On the next day, another constitution was put into effect for the Shia Imami Ismailis of Pakistan.[4] In 1968, a third constitution was promulgated in India.

Although these constitutions are alike in spirit, they differ in several points according to the different circumstances prevalent in Africa, Pakistan and India. One can also notice that these constitutions, if taken together, differ in many points from the classical code of laws found in al-Qāḍī an-Nuʿmān's *Daʿāʾim al-Islām,* which was the main Ismaili legal source during the Fāṭimids. This is explained by the present Aga Khan IV. Upon his sanctioning *The Constitution of the Councils and Jamats of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims of Pakistan,* he addressed his followers by saying, « Look to the spirit and not the letter of the Constitution.»[5] This fact is a clear indication of the adaptability of the Ismailis to the requirements of a constantly changing time and society. ««Rigidity,» as the late Aga Khan III says, «is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook. There have really been no cut-and-dried rules,» continues the Aga Khan, «even the set of regulations known as the Holy Laws are directions as to method and procedure and not detailed orders about results to be obtained.»[6] The late Aga Khan goes on to explain, «In some countries — India and Africa for example — the Ismailis have a council system, under which their local councillors are charged with all internal administrative responsibility, and report to me as to their doings. In Syria, Central Asia, and Iran, leadership... is vested in either hereditary or recommended

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 23.

(2) Published by «His Highness the Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismailia Supreme Council for Africa.» Nairobi, Kenya.

(3) *The Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismailis in Africa,* article I, p. 2.

(4) Published by «His Royal Highness Prince Aga Khan Ismailia Federal Council for Pakistan.» Karachi, Pakistan.

(5) Sherali Alidina, *Ten Eventful Years of Imamat of H.R.H. Prince Karim Aga Khan, Imām-e-Zaman,* p. 13.

(6) Aga Khan III, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

leaders and chiefs, who are the Imam's representatives and who look after the administration of the various Jamats or congregations.»[1]

Be that as it may, the supreme authority lies undisputedly in the Imam. Article 1 of the constitution, by which the Shia Imami Ismailis of Pakistan abide, reads as follows:

> Mowlana Hazar Imam[2] has absolute and final authority and discretion to abrogate, suspend, rescind, amend, delete, alter, add to, vary or modify the Constitution or any provisions thereof.[3]

Likewise, article 5 of the constitution followed by the Shia Imami Ismaili community in Africa states:

> Nothing herein contained shall affect the absolute Power and Sole Authority of Mowlana Hazar Imam to alter, amend, modify, vary or annul at any time or grant dispensation from the Constitution or any part thereof.[4]

However, in these constitutions the Islamic nature of the Shia Imami Ismailis is emphasized. They start by pronouncing the Ismaili belief that the Prophet Muḥammad is the last of the Prophets.

As for the system of councils according to which the Shia Imami Ismailis in Pakistan, India and Africa are organized, it reflects a highly functional order under the authoritative supremacy of the Imam of the time.

For practical purposes *The Constitution of the Councils and Jamats of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims of Pakistan* may be taken as an example.

(1) *Ibid.*

(2) That is the present Imam.

(3) *The Constitution of the Councils and Jamats of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims of Pakistan*, p. 3.

(4) *The Constitution of the Shia Ismailis in Africa*, p. 3.

In Pakistan the Shia Imami Ismaili community is organized according to a series of councils, the highest of which is the Federal Council for Pakistan. Under the jurisdiction of this Council are several Supreme Councils. These Supreme Councils are, according to the Constitution, five in number: a Supreme Council for Karachi, Gwadur and Ormara; another for Hyderabad, Khairpur and Quetta Divisions; a third for Sargodha, Lahore, Multan and Bahawalpur Areas; a fourth for Rawalpindi, Peshawar and Masdan Areas; and a fifth for East Pakistan.[1] These five Supreme Councils «carry out all the orders and directives issued by the Federal Council.»[2] Under each of these Supreme Councils are a number of Divisional, District or Local Councils. These Divisional, District and Local Councils are twenty-three in number[3]. They «carry out the orders and directives issued» by the respective Supreme Councils[4].

The Federal Council exercises «over-all control and authority over all the Supreme, Divisional, District and Local Councils in Pakistan.»[5] The Functions of the Federal Council are stated in the Constitution as follows:

(a) To hear and decide appeals from the decisions of all Supreme Councils;

(b) To bring uniformity in all customs, usages, rules and regulations of the Community all over Pakistan as far as and whenever possible;

(c) The Federal Council shall have powers to perform and do all acts and things mentioned in the general and aforesaid objects here-in-before mentioned and shall have authority and discretion to perform and do

(1) *The Constitution of the Councils and Jamats of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims of Pakistan*, p. 39.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 5.

(3) *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 5.

(5) *Ibid.*

all acts and things; which it considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of carrying out and furthering the said objects subject to any directions from Mowlana Hazar Imam. The Federal Council's activities will be confined to those subjects which affect the Ismaili Community all over Pakistan.[1]

As for the capacity of the Supreme Councils, it is also stated in the Constitution as follows:

(a) To hear and decide appeals from the decisions of all Divisional / District / Local Councils within their jurisdiction.

(b) To decide disputes over territorial jurisdiction between two or more Divisional / District / Local Councils situated within their jurisdiction.

(c) To decide disputes between two or more organizations or institutions falling within the jurisdiction of two or more Divisional / District / Local Councils situated within their jurisdiction.

(d) To hear and decide disputes between two or more individuals residing within the jurisdiction of two or more Divisional / District / Local Councils on application made to it by any party, provided Council in its discretion allows such application. However, such discretion as far as possible be exercised in favour of the female party.

(e) To hear and decide petitions and representations, made to it from within its jurisdiction.

(1) *Ibid.*, article 28, p. 7.

(f) To coordinate the working of all social institutions functioning within its jurisdiction.[1]

As far as the functions of the Divisional, District or Local Councils are concerned, they are also stated in detail in the Constitution. They are:

(a) To hear and decide all disputes in respect of matters provided in this constitution;

(b) To hear and decide petitions and representations made to it within its jurisdiction;

(c) To supervise, coordinate and regulate the affairs of Institutions under its jurisdiction in the best interest of the Jamat.[2]

In addition to this hierarchical system of Councils found in Pakistan and to similar systems found in India and Africa, there are also found in Pakistan, India and Africa Central Organizations which, though different in certain respects from each other, are similar in spirit.

Since Pakistan has been taken as an example, it is therefore more convenient to continue with using the Central Organizations in Pakistan as an example for such organizations.

The Shia Imami Ismaili community in Pakistan enjoys the following Central Organizations:

1. The Ismailia Association for Pakistan. It deals with the religious aspect of the Community as well as publishing and distributing writings regarding the faith. It also deals with supervising missionary work.

2. The Economic, Planning and Grants Council for Ismailis in Pakistan. This deals with promoting, financing and planning economic projects which would lead to the welfare of the Community.

(1) *Ibid.*, article 68, p. 12.
(2) *Ibid.*, article 99, p. 15.

3. The Central Health Board for Pakistan. This organization is maintained to care for the needs of the Community regarding hospitals, maternity institutions and public health.

4. The Central Education Board for Pakistan. It deals with promoting education, serving the needs of the students of the Community and facilitating the progress of education and supervising various schools.

The presidents of these organizations are ex-officio members of the Federal Council.[1]

The heads of such organizations, whether in Pakistan or any other place where similar organizations are found, are directly appointed by the Aga Khan to administer and conduct the affairs of their respective organizations. They are directly responsible to the Aga Khan. They may also deal with any other matters entrusted to them by the Aga Khan.[2]

The place of worship of the Shia Imami Ismailis is called *Jamatkhana* (i.e. mosque). These *Jamatkhanas* are established in every city or town where a considerable Ismaili community resides.[3]

Each of these *Jamatkhanas* is officiated by officers called *Mukhi* and *Kamadia*.

The main functions of the *Mukhis* and *Kamadias* are the performance and officiation at all religious ceremonies and rites including birth, marriage, betrothal and death, in addition to looking after the *Jamatkhana*.[4] While the *Mukhi* administers the religious affairs within the *Jamatkhana*, representing therein the Imam, the *Kamadia* is in charge of the records of the *Jamatkhana*.

In addition to these organizations, the provisions of the personal law of the Shia Imami Ismailis reveal a great deal of

(1) *Ibid.*, article 248, p. 35.

(2) *The Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismailis in Africa*, article 181, p. 20.

(3) *Ibid.*, articles 363, 364, 365, p.38. Also see *The Constitution of the Councils and Jamats of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims of Pakistan*, pp. 4, 30.

(4) *The Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismailis in Africa*, article 3, p. 3.

planning and adaptability to the developing conditions of the Ismailis in a modern society. These provisions are stated in detail in the constitutions of the Shia Imami Ismaili communities.[1]

For the general conditions of the Ismailis, I find it appropriate to end this book with the words of the late Aga Khan III. He said:

> ... And now, in spite of all the vast political shifts and changes which the world has undergone; I think it may reasonably be claimed that the lot of the Ismailis in general throughout the world is a fairly satisfactory one; wherever they are settled their communities compose a happy, self-respecting, law-abiding, and industrious element in Society.[2]

(1) See *Ibid.*, part VII, pp. 25-35. *The Constitution of the Councils and Jamats of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims of Pakistan*, chapter XI, pp. 33-34.

(2) Aga Khan III, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

APPENDIX[1]

ISMAILIA ASSOCIATION PAKISTAN

Branch I
DACCA
CHITTAGONG
KHULNA
Ref. N°....

Head Quarter:
HARRIS ROAD, KHARADHAR
P.O.Box 4899
KARACHI-2

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISMAILI FAITH

Ismailis believe,

1. That God Almighty is one. He is eternal. He was neither born nor gave birth. He is the creator and maintainer of everything and everything entirely depends on Him. Nothing from His creatures is like unto Him.

2. That the Holy Prophet Muhammad is the last and final Prophet. Before him Prophets came with books revealed to them; the Holy Quran being the last revealed book.

3. That the life hereafter is true and the Dooms-Day is certainly to come when the good will be rewarded according to their deeds and the bad will be punished according to their actions.

4. That after the demise of the Holy Prophet Muhammad the presence of the Imam is necessary in all ages to maintain the unity of faith of those who believe in him and give them guidance befitting the changing conditions of the time and developing human society.

5. That such Imam must always be available to his follower s and is responsible for their guidance always and everywhere on the surface of the earth.

(1) This document and the one on the following page were issued by the Ismailia Association of Pakistan.

6. That every such Imam must be in a genealogical line of succession right from Hazrat Aly, the first Imam, on the principle of a formal appointment by each predecessor Imam to his successor Imam.

7. That Hazrat Aly, the first Imam, according to Ismailis received his appointment as Imam from the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) who declared openly; «O! Aly you are to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there will be no prophet after me.»

8. That the obedience of the Imam of the time is a fundamental religious obligation on the Ismailis, and his disobedience is a paramount sin.

9. That all Muslims are one, despite their differences on account of their respective sects.

These are the fundamentals of Ismaili Faith followed by the followers of His Royal Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan, the present Imam of the Ismailis.

THE DOCTRINE OF IMAMATE WITH ISMAILIS

After the demise of the Holy Prophet, all the Muslims unanimously felt the necessity of having a successor of the Prophet to maintain the solidarity of the Muslims and the unity of their religious faith, which is a basic part of Islam. But they differed in the idea. Those who explained the relationship implied in the Hadith; «O! Aly you are to me as Aaron was to Moses» in the spiritual sense, as it is clear in the following verses of the Holy Quran: — «(Moses) said: My Lord: Relieve my mind and ease my task or me. And loose a knot from my tongue that they may understand my saying. Appoint for me a supporter from my folk, Aaron, my brother. Confirm my strength with him. And let him share my task.» He said: «Thou art granted thy request, O! Moses». (Sura Taha, verses 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32 and 36) — recognised Aly to be the Imam or real successor of the Prophet, to guide the people after him, without identifying the Imamate with a temporal rule or Caliphat. But those who were not of this opinion, of course without being prejudiced to Aly, elected, after a bitter controversy, Hazrat Abu Bakr as the successor of the Prophet. As the Ismaili Shia do not identify the Imamate with the Caliphat, they are not opposed to the Caliphat of Hazrat Abu Bakr, Hazrat Omar and Hazrat Othman, whom they respect as the great companions of the Prophet, and best friends of Hazrat Aly.

Imamate, according to the Ismailis is a religious necessity for the maintenance of the unity of faith and for making the religion always possible. Without the lead of the Imam, the unity of faith is not possible and the religion becomes a subject of metaphysical controversy for the theologians and the men of letters. This makes the religion beyond the understanding of a large number of men, who consequently become victims of superstitions which then are mistaken to be the part of religious belief. Thus religion comes in conflict with reason that leads that the religion loses its hold over intelligent.

Besides, without the lead of the Imam the religion will lose its dynamic force and become stagnant, and the religious moral system which is based on do-and-do-not-do turns to be simply an ethical science. To put the moral philosophy of Islam into practice, to keep the social unity of the Muslims coherent and infuse in it the spirit of co-operation and altruism, to achieve all these blessings for the faithful as demanded by God so strongly in the Holy Qur'an, there must be the Imam whose word is obeyed as a basic principle of the faith. Once a man came to Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq and asked him: «O! the son of the messenger of Allah, why Muslims are disunited?» The Imam replied: «Were they disunited during the time of the messenger of Allah?» The man said: «No.» The Imam said: «Because they were obeying a single order of the Prophet and not going here and there in the matter of religion.»

Indeed, the secret of the success and progress of the early Muslims lies here at the base of the united faith in the single order of the Holy Prophet. Thus unity of the faith is a great blessing that cannot be achieved without the Imam of the time.

The Ismailis, therefore, believe that Imamate is a basic necessity of Islam without which, they believe, they cannot achieve salvation, here or in the hereafter.

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